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TWENTY YEARS OF MILITANT-RESEARCH: LA POTENCIA DESTITUYENTE Y LA POTENCIA FEMINISTA (DRAFT)

NONPOLITICS CAPITAL, DESTITUTION, FEMINISM, NEOLIBERALISM, POWER, RIOT, STRIKE

[part 1 & 2 of a longer essay on the past two decades of 'militant-research'. part 3, *A Feminist Internationale Assembled in a Riotous Manner*, forthcoming]

Demands, protests, petitions, graffiti, discussions, harangues, slogans, shouts, cheers and insults are so many links in a chain of discourse that can give us a great deal of

information about the aspirations, desires and conceptions of the workers [...] These are precious, fleeting forms, the skeleton of a movement which too often know only the principal actors. Silent sufferings, desires buried beneath the exhausting monotony of everyday life, rise up here and find expression. Full of sound and gesture, a strike is an outpouring of words, a psycho-drama in which repressed drives are liberated. It plunges down into the heart of the unknown masses.[Michelle Perrot, Workers on Strike: France 1871-1890]

Within the recent body of scholarship dedicated to capital's form-determinations, surplus populations, and the historical-material modifications to the tactics of the strike and the riot, there appears to be an equivocation between the form assumed/constructed by struggles themselves and the conditions that act upon their self-activity; and particularly with those frameworks that emphasise the strike and the riot as struggles defined *both* by their location in production or circulation *and* by their form determinations vis-a-vis the valorization process. "The riot," it has been said, "is the form of struggle given to surplus populations, already racialized... whose location in the social structure compels them to some forms of collective action rather than others." And yet, if contemporary riots (as the political form surplus rebellions assume in the current conjuncture) are determined by the forms of value to which it is indexed by its "location in the social structure," how, then, is this not a theory of the riot that results in an understanding of riot prime (circulation struggles) as an instance of value-determination, as opposed to a counter-determination of capitalist social relations by surplus populations themselves?

Interestingly enough, one possible beginning toward addressing this problem is to be found in Clover's own articulation of the correspondence between the form of struggle and cycles of accumulation:

strike as the form of collective action that struggles to set the price of labour power, is unified by worker identity, and unfolds in the context of production; riot, struggles to set prices in the market, is unified by shared dispossession, and unfolds in the context of consumption. Strike and riot are distinguished further as leading tactics within the generic categories of production and circulation struggles. We might now restate and elaborate these tactics as being each a set of practises used by people when their reproduction is threatened. Strike and riot are practical struggles over reproduction within production and circulation, respectively...They make structured and improvisational uses of the given terrain, but it is a terrain they have neither made nor chosen. The riot is a circulation struggle because both capital and its dispossessed have been driven to seek reproduction there.

What is striking in this passage is that what comes to define both the strike and the riot is not simply their position within the circuit of capital, but how their primary concern is one of resolving issues of reproduction while only conditionally unfolding as struggles of circulation or production. And this is precisely what is demonstrated here with the definition of strikes and riots as tactics employed in struggles over reproduction. However, to say that "a theory of riot is a theory of crisis," subordinates this separation between struggles and their conditions such that

crisis acts through riots. If nothing else, it is by maintaining this antagonism and separation between struggles and their “terrain,” that one can avoid conflating determinations of value with determinations of social movements. A separation between determining condition (production-circulation) and determining agent (proletariat, surplus populations) such that, despite their limitations, the particularly promising content of riots and strikes is not simply equated with the compulsion of value. That is to say, if the reproduction of labour power and the self-valorization of capital simply name “the same activities...seen from different positions,” it is also the case that struggles over reproduction can be more or less reproductive of value, and suggests the possibility of a mode of struggle that reproduces itself without reproducing the value relation itself.

It appears to be the case that conceiving of strikes and riots in terms of their structurally determined location in the circuit of value loses sight of the fact that, the revolutionary potential of strikes and riots to break with the logic of capital emerges from its ability to reproduce itself without reproducing capitalist social relations as well. What is achieved by means of this “analytical correlation between the present shape of accumulation and the leading tactic of action” is not the delineation of “the contours of a ‘leading subject’, but its palpable absence ” such that it is neither surplus populations nor a recomposed proletariat but value that riots in the streets. To make matters worse, this impossibility of defining the ‘leading subject’ of surplus rebellions makes it all but impossible to say whether there is a meaningful difference between surplus rebellions of various compositions and their corresponding levels of courage and militancy. Surely there is *some* difference between the surplus rebellion that demands entry into the world of wage labour and the surplus rebellion that seeks its abolition? At the end of 2001, Argentina’s partisans of insurrection would learn, first hand, under what conditions one is able to make such a distinction:

[A]n unemployed is someone who, above all, is looking for and desires a job. She wants to work, not to question the society of wage labour [...] In contrast, the name piqueteros expresses something different. Piqueteros tells us about a subject operation. It is not a synonym for unemployed. The unemployed is a subject determined by need, defined by a lack. The piquetero is someone conditioned by need, but not determined by it. The difference is a major one: the piquetero has managed to produce a subjective operation on a socially precarious background. She cannot deny her condition, but neither does she submit herself to it. And in this subjectifying act she appropriates her possibilities of action.

To be clear, the claim here is not that it would be “wrong” to make use of the categories of circulation struggles and surplus rebellion; to the contrary, it is hard to imagine any critical appraisal of the present without their use. Rather, our claim is that there is more in the self-determination of surplus populations than we are able to grasp via their abstract form determinations, such as the difference between the unemployed and the *piquetero* — for each are figures that belong to worlds that exclude the existence of the other’s by necessity. If the failures of historical communism have taught present day intellectuals anything, it is the naivete of perpetually refining sufficiently self-transparent cognitive abstractions. And rightly so, since

what we are confronted with regarding the indiscernible difference of the unemployed as opposed to a *piquetero* is not primarily a theoretical problem but a question of the concrete content (i.e. self-activity) implied by various forms of social practice.

What differentiates the *piquetero* from the unemployed is not a difference in its concept (since both are simply attributes of a substance in excess of its productive instances) but a difference in its activity. Along with Sohn-Rethel, we could say that what appears with the *piquetero* is indeed an abstraction that is real rather than cognitive: “an abstraction not in the mind, but in fact. It is a state of affairs prevailing at a definite place and lasting a definite time.” That is to say, the *piquetero* as a non-cognitive and concrete social practice names a form-of-life that, for a time, successfully suspended the continuous subsumption of everyday life under the real abstractions of capital. It is in this sense that distinguishing the *piquetero* from the unemployed is a problem of concrete social practice prior to its becoming a problem for the practice of critical theory. As Colectivo Situaciones puts it:

The roadblocks did not inherit knowledges exclusively from working class struggles. They also constitute levels of elaboration of more recent struggles. In 1993 began a cycle of insurrections and urban revolts in several provinces of the interior of the country. The roadblock appears as a higher level of the organisation of the unemployed and contributes to channel those struggles. The roadblock is a weapon of those who do not have any other means than their capacity to control territories with their presence. In this sense it is the common heritage of the unemployed, indigenous peoples, evictees, and a broad conglomerate of people that neoliberalism calls “the excluded.”

It is for this reason that, insofar as the reality of surplus rebellions continue to be posed as a question of their form-determination, we will continue to find ourselves unable to grasp the *content* of what surplus populations do with all that time spent ‘outside’ the wage-relation; continue to live the impoverished life absent the perception and experience of a different kind of abstraction wherein time is experienced as the dimension of human freedom and not the impersonal form of our abstraction domination; continue to only see unemployed workers amidst a crowd of *piqueteros*, who enjoin us to live in the scandal of our truth, which “opens up a different space of abstraction that appears related to the abandonment of representation as a political and existential practice” and thereby construct “a politics of potentiality based on the materiality of this barbarous truth,” whose experience is that of freedom. “For freedom is a perceptible fabric...but it cannot be known without being experienced.”

19-20 DECEMBER 2001: THE BIRTH OF LA POTENCIA DESTITUYENTE

One million people took to the streets of Buenos Aires to protest the collapse of Argentina’s economy — a collapse set to the tune of 150 billion US Dollars (the amount of debt owed to the IMF). And what, only later, would come to be known as “the events of the 19th and 20th” named the formation of insurrectionary forms of struggle in the face of a seemingly irreparable “economic and financial crisis induced by the neoliberal policies of [then president] Carlos Menem (1989-1995) and, in the end, the lack of international financial aid, after private savings

accounts had been frozen, among other things, on 1 December of that year, to protect the parity of the Argentinian peso with the US dollar.” In the midst of what would prove to be the opening salvo of a decade-long crisis, new forms of struggle appeared, which subsequently gave rise to the invention of novel forms of theorising and political practice. Moreover, while traditional models of workers organisations in the 60's and 70's revolved around the factory (e.g. sit-ins, work slow downs, strikes, and so on), these nascent social movements found themselves displaced from the point of production.

Given the decades long increase in unemployment leading up to the 2001 crisis, Argentina witnessed the emergence of the *Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados* (Unemployed Workers Movement or **MTD**), for whom the *piquete* (blockade) served as the new form of struggle outside of the factory-site. The piquetes, which first appeared in the center of the country, had as its aim the obstruction of the circulation of commodities. Thus, the *piquete* was the practical resolution devised by **MTD** to the question of what it means to strike outside of the workplace as the traditional site of struggle when there is neither a boss nor an employment contract and wage to bargain over. Thus, it was in light of the emergence of these new social movements and their corresponding forms of struggle that the militant research collective, *Colectivo Situaciones*, developed the concept of de-instituent power; a category of political theorizing that has now come to be known simply as destituent power:

...the movement of the 19th and 20th was more a de-instituting action than a classical instituting movement. Or, in other words, sovereign [constituted] and instituting [constituent] powers (potencias) were the ones that became rebellious without instituting pretensions...while exercising their de-instituting powers on the constituted powers. This seems to be the paradox of the 19th and 20th. An assemblage of instituting powers disposed in such [a] way that, far from founding a new sovereign order, operates by delegitimizing the politics executed in its name [...] Unlike political revolutions, this de-instituent insurrection did not produce a “situation of situations,” a center replacing the centrality of the state it questioned. This was an experience of self-affirmation [...] In it there was a re-discovery of popular powers [such that] de-instituting action seems to postulate another path for practicing politics and enunciating social change.

As *Colectivo Situaciones* elaborate further: the “hypothesis could be enunciated in this way: the positivity of the negation lies as much in the de-institution of the existing political forms, both representative and institutional, as in the becomings it opens.” And it is precisely for this reason that *Colectivo Situaciones'* translators, Nate Holdren and Sebastian Touza, define de-instituent power, and its attendant rejection of the social norms that govern daily life by decreasing in the set of possible actions proper to collective subjectivity, as the name for a form of collectivity capable of actualizing a “point of irreversibility in the development of resistance, a moment when the principal task becomes to develop and secure what has been achieved by the struggle.”

It was precisely this dual rejection of constituent and constituted power that most threatened the State with respect to this period of transversal and informal relations between struggles of the unemployed surplus populations, factory workers, women, organization of the mothers of the

youth disappeared under the military dictatorship, and landless peasants. There was no demand made of the State, only that “*Que se vayan todos!*” [all of them must go] and their collective discovery of the potential forms of anti-state living. It was a moment characterized by the attempt to establish the relations that would allow for the coordinated rebellion of various local groups to reproduce itself while suspending the social relations of capital. Whether they were unemployed or factory workers, women or landless peasants, what linked them to one another was a shared question, collectively posed to themselves: *what would it look like to strike outside of the point of production?* Commenting on the destituent insurrections of 2001 more than 15 years after the events, former Colectivo Situaciones member and current member of Ni Una Menos Collective, Verónica Gago writes:

The 2001 crisis in Argentina—tied to a continental sequence of anti-neoliberal revolts and uprisings—provided a space for theoretical-political creation. The moment of eruption of “subjectivities of the crisis,” that took the form of movements of the unemployed, experiences of self-management in factories and neighbourhoods, and practices of alternative and popular economy (from barter clubs to the community supply networks to popular markets), demonstrated a capacity for opposition and action that was capable of breaking the neoliberal consensus. At the same time, it was able to articulate, in a new way, forms of resistance that had been woven together over the course of years. All of political theory is put to the test in moments like those [...] In our collective militant investigation, we called that power destituent: precisely for its capacity to overthrow and remove the hegemony of the political system based on parties and for opening up a temporality of radical indetermination based on the power of bodies in the street. We also wanted to emphasize that what was called spontaneous was actually the visibilization of a fabric that had been patiently constructed, that synthesized a long elaboration from below, and that went deep enough to question the very distinction between the “social” and the “political.” Therefore we spoke of a “new social protagonism.

Destituent power arose as a way of talking about, and thinking through, the particular kind of collective practice that suspends the political and economic processes that govern/manage populations; governing by establishing a (false) equivalence between what is possible in terms of the quality of one’s life and their subject-position relative to capitalist nation-states (i.e. job). It is a collective practice that achieves this effect of suspension via the self-organization, and self-determination, of relations, internal and among groups, that resolves various crises of social reproduction without the reproduction of value. The paradigm of destituent insurrection, which emerged from the events of the 19th and 20th of December 2001, is that of a political form incommensurate with the form of value; the name for a kind of social activity, which suspends the political and economic processes that govern/manage populations by establishing a (false) equivalence between the lives of individuals and the place they come to occupy in society, their subject-position relative to capitalist nation-states.

And so, if theorists such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri — both of whom were witness to the events unfolding and would go on to write forewords for Colectivo Situaciones’ text — relied on the language of the commune, it is because, as Marx put it regarding the 1871 Paris

Commune, it is there that the political form of freedom [commune] was discovered. That is to say, the novelty of this political sequence is its having assumed a form other than those of production and circulation struggles. What Marx intimated as the “form of freedom” harbored by the image of Paris Commune appeared once more at the turn of the century, this time in Argentina via the form of destituent practices.

Therefore, the insurrection’s ‘absolute refusal’ of long standing forms/institutions of both the neoliberal nation-state and the repertoire of acts of negation inherited from previous cycles of struggles—namely, the union and the party—gave shape to the structuring dynamic of the political sequence referred to as the ‘19th and 20th of December 2001;’ a period defined by social movements capable of developing the means for the further reproduction of militant forms of anti-state struggle via practices such as “the control of money, or bartering; of counterviolence, as in road blocks; and of political command over diverse territories, as in assemblies.” And it was this capacity for concretely determining the shape of anti-statist and anti-capitalist struggle that serves as the sometimes forgotten historical/material referent of what now is simply called “destituent power.” And yet, in their reflections on the victories and setbacks, both during and in the wake of 2001, Colectivo Situaciones issue the most sobering of analyses:

[I]f during what we called the de-instituent’ phase, social movements attacked the neoliberal state constituting practices capable of confrontation...social movements, if we can still call them that, currently confront new dilemmas about whether to participate or not (and when, and how) in what could be called a ‘new governmentality,’ thus expressing the distinguishing features of a new phase of the state form and requiring us to problematize the concept of social movement itself.

That is to say, the insurrection of 2001 was ‘de-instituent’ precisely because it was through such practices that the refusal of surplus populations and an increasingly flexibilized working-class, was no longer the serial accumulation of empty acts of negation; rather, their refusal was nothing other than the construction of a set of (social) relations [barter], forms of self-organization [popular assemblies], and tactical innovations [*piquete*, or road-block], whose practical efficacy was no longer due to their subordination to the interests of either State or Party. And it is in this sense that *2001 is said to be the year of destituent insurrections*. Of its many virtues, the novel innovation achieved by Argentina’s social movements was its capacity for transforming a discrete set of acts of insubordination into the means of reproducing/sustaining insurrection (as the form struggles assumed) *without reproducing capital’s value form-determinations*.

This, however, is not simply the temporary suspension of the processes of valorization/accumulation. Seen from the vantage point of capital, the suspended time of insurrection is simply the *absence* of value in motion. Seen from the vantage point of social movements themselves, however, the suspension of time is simply another name for an *anti-social (social) reproduction*—i.e. that modality of struggle wherein the direct confrontation with the various form-determinations of valorization presupposes, and gives rise to, a form of its reproduction that is itself no longer a moment of commodity production; a moment defined by a rupture between the reproduction of the productive capacities of a population and the demands of the

production process; a moment where value is no longer the name for a form of struggle or a form of life. As Colectivo Situaciones put it,

From a more traditional position the participants of that insurrection are accused of lacking feasible proposals, of not making a reasonable use of their demands. In the end, we are apparently dealing with an incomplete event...Nevertheless, a perspective focused on finding sense in these events might ask what it is that connected so many people in the same intense and concentrated time. The hypothesis could be enunciated in this way: the positivity of the negation lies as much in the de-institution of the existing political forms, both representative and institutional, as in the becoming it opens. In other words, the power (potencia) of the 19th and 20th consists in the possibility of constituting a single plane of action, which disavows the hierarchies that organise institutional and political interaction.

It is at this juncture, however, that we confront a series of questions: of what use are these reflections on the events of 2001 in Argentina for anything other than one more rehearsal of the periodization of the present cycle of struggles? And in what sense does 2001 continue to serve as the supplement to that which communist theory can never satisfy?

The cardinal epistemic virtue of the militant-research carried out prior to, during, and after the events of 2001 is precisely what it achieved: the practical realisation of a really existing possibility (*potencia*) for “the real movement” of communism to assume various form of reproducing the insurrection that did not depend upon capital’s value form-determinations for its concrete existence. It is because “communist theory has certainty of purpose, [but] not of success” that this liberation of the forms by which the “real movement that abolishes the present state of things and itself” is collectively reproduced from every form of subsumption is 2001’s practical success vis-a-vis the self-certainty of the militant-intellectual. Communism, to be sure, is nothing other than “the *real* movement that abolishes the present state of things.” That said, it is the fate of both the victories and setbacks from previous cycles of struggle to persist as the historical and material *premises* of abolition as such. It is in this sense, then, that we must understand Marx’s claim that communism finds the conditions of its realisation “from the premises now in existence.”

THE BIRTH OF (POPULAR) NEOLIBERALISM (2002-2007)

“The arrival of the government of Eduardo Duhalde, in January 2002, set in motion the delicate process of reconstructing governance after the rupture of December,” the opening salvo of a process whose consummation would follow under Nestor Kirchner’s presidency (2003-2007). What began with Duhalde in 2002 was the development of a new mode of governmentality in response to the upheavals of 2001, and whose aim was that of recovering the State’s *leverage* in negotiating with groups such as the piqueteros (something De La Rúa was unable to do from 1999-2001), and reimposing forms of *control* over the insurrections centers of decision-making power: the popular assemblies in poor (urban and rural) neighborhoods throughout the country. “In this respect it is fitting to recall Duhalde’s phrase as he just assumed the presidency (having actually lost in the presidential elections against De la Rúa): ‘it is impossible to govern with

assemblies.” [1] Emilia Castorina, ‘The Reproduction of Democratic Neoliberalism: Kirchner’s ‘Solution’ to the Crisis of 2001,’

Despite an ultimately truncated presidency, Duhalde’s government implemented a series of social programmes such as the *Planes Jefe y Jefas de Hogar* (JyJDH), which facilitated cash transfers of US\$150 per month to unemployed persons in return for 4-6 hours of work per day, and established a governing body to oversee the management and distribution of social benefits within more than half of Argentina’s localities—the *Consejos Consultivos Locales* (CCL)—which required the autonomous decision making bodies of the *piqueteros* to collaborate with local authorities and NGOs in exchange for the juridical recognition of their right to certain benefits. However, it is not the fact of these programmes’ success in increasing access and receipt of much needed material relief that is at issue. Rather, what is at issue is the JyJDH and the CCL’s identical social function: substituting class collaboration for surplus rebellion via the *inclusion* of social movements willing to negotiate with the government and the *exclusion* of those social movements who refused any complicity in the absolution and/or re-legitimation of the Argentine state.

The consequences of these seemingly straightforward policies of wealth redistribution were devastating in their effects, resulting in situations where unemployed and precarious workers were now confronted by local “mayors who kept control of the on-the-ground administration of the programme, [thus] giving them *de facto* veto power regarding who was and who was not a legitimate welfare recipient.” As Emilia Castorina helpfully puts it in her analysis of Argentina’s post-2001 model for restoring social peace and economic stability:

The JyJDH programme became instrumental in dividing the *piqueteros*. Up to this point, the different organizations had relations of cooperation, but this massive state relief programme opened a new period of conflict and competition among them. The government and the media introduced a distinction between ‘good’ *piqueteros* (‘moderates’ or *dialoguistas*) and ‘bad’ *piqueteros* (‘hard liners’ or *combativos*) depending on their propensity towards bargaining and dialogue with the government. Critically, only the ‘good’ ones (*Federacion Tierra y Vivienda*) and *Corriente Classista y Combativa* (Classist and Combative Current) were chosen by Duhalde from the entire *piquetero* movement to officially participate in the *Consejo Consultivo Nacional*, the central body charged with managing the JyJDH.

That said, Duhalde’s two-fold strategy of reimposing control within popular assemblies and purchasing social peace via the expansion of social relief benefits was not shy about its reliance on the most brutal forms of state-sponsored violence, and whose intention was given its most direct expression with the massacre of Puente Pueyrredon: “On June 26, 2002, police attacked a group of *piqueteros* conducting a roadblock on the Puente Pueyrredon Bridge. Police shot and killed two protesters, injured ninety, and arrested over one hundred, sparking massive demonstrations in response.” Such gratuitous state violence, with which the strategy of divide and conquer was alloyed, not only prepared the grounds for Argentina’s transition from a traditionally conservative neoliberalism to a ‘democratic’ or ‘popular’ neoliberalism. The ensuing scandal was impetus enough for Duhalde to call for elections only five months after taking

office.

From 2003 to 2007, the government of Nestor Kirchner perfected the rehabilitation of the regime of 'popular' neoliberalism that began under Duhalde. Benefitting from a rise in approval ratings — due, in part, to the government's successful negotiations with international financial institutions, and led to an unprecedented discount on Argentina's foreign debt — Kirchner proceeded to implement a model of economic recovery based on the following formula: **[(soybean + oil ground rent) x devaluation] + fall of wages and state relief programmes**. In practice, this formula amounted to combining the simultaneous increase in agricultural production (soybean, soybean oil, and ground oil rent) and devaluation of the Argentine-peso, with the increase in both investment and access to state relief programmes for the poor and unemployed in order to offset/manage the subsequent fall of wages. In the end, the fiscal surplus that resulted from this combination of currency devaluation and the agricultural sector's growth provided Kirchner's government with the means of purchasing social peace via state sponsored social relief programmes, such as the "Social Capital Funds" and "Solidarity Funds for Development."

Despite the temptation of taking recourse in some ostensible cunning of reason, Kirchner's model for economic recovery was as much a product of ingenuity as it was the successful adaption of "the World Bank's new trend of 'incorporating the poor.'" Moreover, the actual effect of this process of 'incorporation' was the introduction of local politicians and nongovernmental organizations, which "allowed the state to withdraw from social provision at virtually no cost" and forced "unemployed organizations to compete with local politicians for funds." In spite of "official" state data, which recorded a decrease in poverty from 57 percent to 32 percent by 2007, Kirchner's model for post-2001 economic growth was such that "of the 2.5 million paid jobs that were created between 2003 and 2005, 1.8 million were informal." In other words, Kirchner's plans for Argentina's post-2001 economic recovery ultimately relied on the renewed development of the processes of accumulation and export-driven growth introduced in the late 1990s, which predicted the prospects of economic growth on the basis of monoculture farming, open-cast mining, and the construction of mega-dam projects.

The lasting effects of this renewal of extractivist forms of accumulation, however, only exacerbated the degree of exploitation of the already immiserated segments of the country's most precarious populations. During the years of Kirchner's so-called economic "recovery," Argentina witnessed the **(i)** loss of 6,000 small farms per year, an **(ii)** acceleration in the rate of land erosion, and a two-fold increase in **(iii)** migration (from rural to urban centers) and **(iv)** the price of domestic commodities such as food, since it became more "profitable for agro-business to export soy than to produce food for the domestic market." In other words, Argentina's post-2001 economic recovery was characterized by an increase in the total concentration of capital (such that 80% of soybean production is owned by multinational corporations), which resulted in the production of an even greater number of superfluous workers, contributing to an ever increasing mass of Argentina's total surplus population.

And yet, what is effectuated throughout this period of post-crisis growth, at both the national and international level, is nothing other than a form of State governance in accordance with the "law

of population peculiar to the capitalist mode of production” — “accumulation of capital is therefore multiplication of the proletariat” — corresponding to the “absolute general law of capitalist accumulation,” wherein “[a]ccumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, the torment of labour, slavery, ignorance, brutalization and moral degradation at the opposite pole, i.e. on the side of the class that produces its own product as capital.” That is to say, along with Marx, that the

greater the social wealth, the functioning capital, the extent and energy of its growth...the greater is the industrial reserve army. The same causes which develop the expansive power of capital, also develop the labour-power at its disposal. The relative mass of the industrial reserve army thus increases with the potential energy of wealth. But the greater this reserve army in proportion to the active labour-army, the greater is the mass of a consolidated surplus population, whose misery is in inverse ratio to the amount of torture it has to undergo in the form of labour. The more extensive, finally, the pauperized sections of the working class and the industrial reserve army, the greater is official pauperism. *This is the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation.*”

For all intents and purposes, what was then referred to as the “k-factor” was a rather duplicitous way of referring to the key factors, which ostensibly led to the “success” of Kirchner’s popular-neoliberal strategy for economic growth. Thus, the so-called “k-factor” amounted to a number of policies, which expanded the Argentine state’s right to intervene in domestic and international matters for economic reasons. Included among its policies was the modification (if not the material function, then the social significance) of the function and meaning of institutions such as the military and the courts, while simultaneously founding the means for the material exchange of benefits for the political allegiance of social movements. Thus, “not only did Kirchner appoint a new Supreme Court and replace Menem’s judges (highly suspected of corruption) with figures renowned for their competence and integrity, he also adopted an entirely new and long-expected policy towards the military, replacing its top ranks and unequivocally condemning the atrocities committed by the dictatorship of 1976–83. He promoted the Congressional annulment of Alfonsín’s laws of ‘End Point’ and ‘Due Obedience’ that, for example, had allowed the military and paramilitary to evade trial for human rights violations. As a result, dozens of members of the armed forces were finally tried and prosecuted, which sharply distinguished Kirchner from Menem who had granted presidential pardons to the generals in 1989” (‘The Reproduction of Democratic Neoliberalism,’ 94, fn.63.).

And yet, the results of this two-fold logic of state capture were not simply the recuperation of the capacity for the State to purchase social peace via class collaboration between social movements and State functionaries. For what becomes increasingly clear — from the appearance of social relief programmes; the rapid increase in internal migration from rural to urban centres due to extractivist accumulation; the use of welfare packages as a means of successfully implementing a strategy of ‘divide and conquer’ at the heart of the piquetero movement; the substitution of class struggle for class collaboration via the governments working relationship with the *Confederacion General del Trabajo* [General Confederation of Labour,

(CGT)] under the leadership of Moyano; Kirchner's *spectacular* reckoning with Argentina's history by replacing Menem's judges (synonymous with corruption) with a newly appointed Supreme Court; the subsequent replacement of top ranking officials in the military; Kirchner's unequivocal condemnation of the atrocities committed by the military during the dictatorship (1976-1983) — is that the *expansion* of access and/or receipt of material benefits via social programmes was coextensive with the *exclusion* of certain social groups. And herein lies the singular importance double articulation. That this double-articulation of expansion *and* exclusion inaugurated a new period in Argentina's history is undoubtedly true. With Duhalde and even more with Kirchner, the Argentine state was no longer characterised by the conservative economics of austerity but by a state said to be both “democratic” (i.e. no longer corrupt) and “populist” (i.e. thus non-dictatorial). That said, by supplanting the conservatism of classical neoliberalism with its populist/democratic counterparts, the Argentine state succeeded in reconstituting the social division of the national population in terms of their *superfluity* or *necessity* for the continuation of Argentina's economic recovery.

This process of the recomposition of the separation between socially necessary labour and surplus populations, which is simultaneously the decomposition of the relations of solidarity that defined the revolutionary potential of 2001 in Argentina, is the “progress” of so-called “progressive governments.” “Progressive governments”, which disciplines its domestic labour market (waged workers) by granting labour unions a greater degree of decision-making and bargaining power with respect to the allocation and distribution of welfare and relief programmes, his process of the recomposition of the separation between socially necessary labour and surplus populations, which is simultaneously the decomposition of the relations of solidarity that defined the revolutionary potential of 2001 in Argentina — Duhalde's inclusion of the *Federacion Tierra y Vivienda* and *Corriente Classista y Combativa* (the unions of the so-called “good” piqueteros) as official participants in the national governing body of the JyJDH attests to this fact.

Now, this dynamic wherein the state(-form) subsumes destituent insurrections — transforming modes of collective subjectivity organised around a common *struggle* into a mass of individuals who bound together simply by a common *condition* — is itself the historical condition that gives rise to the State's capacity for endowing socially necessary labour and surplus populations with their respective relations of composition. And so, just as the failure of the workers movement served as the practical refutation of the revolutionary potential once presumed as inherent to the factory worker, the piquetero movement's eventual subsumption by, and transformation into a function of, the state signals the retirement of the figure of the unemployed worker; of the one who, in place of desiring a job, questions what a society organised around wage labour is actually worth.

The successful recomposition of surplus and necessary labour-power via Argentina's form of popular neoliberalism signalled the death of the *piquetero* as the name for a collective subject for whom communism is not simply a regulative ideal but the approaching horizon of emancipation. Hence Colectivo Situaciones' diagnosis — whereby social movements “confront

new dilemmas about whether to participate or not (and when, and how) in what could be called a ‘new governmentality,’ thus expressing the distinguishing features of a new phase of the state form and requiring us to problematize the concept of social movement itself” — which would ultimately lead them to shift their attention away from the figures of previous cycles of surplus rebellions (piquetero) and undertake militant investigations across the various strata of a newly formed surplus population.

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